



Tribulation



TITLE & AUTHOR

Tribulation
By W.D. Furioso



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What does the future hold? If we were to give a one-word answer to that question, that one word would be **“Tribulation”**. Jesus told us that 2000 years ago.

In Matthew 24 Jesus said the indications of the end of the age¹ would be deception², lawlessness,³ and **tribulations**⁴. “Deception” and “lawlessness” are topics for other messages.⁵ The focus of this message is **“Tribulation”**. The tribulations Jesus specifies just in Matthew 24 are wars, international unrest, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, and betrayals of the followers of Christ.

In the parallel passage in Luke’s gospel, plagues, terrors, and great signs from heaven are also listed.⁶ Also in Luke’s gospel, a statement by Jesus is recorded in which He tells us that “these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately”.⁷ This tells us that these tribulations “are characteristic of the entire present age, not just signs of the end of the age”.⁸

¹ Matthew 24:3

² Matthew 24:4-5

³ Matthew 24:12

⁴ Matthew 24:6-14

⁵ I have written on deception in my book *“The Spirit of the World”*: [paperback](#), [eBook](#).

⁶ Luke 21:7-12

⁷ Luke 21:9

⁸ Notes from the *NASB Study Bible* (Zondervan)

And in John's gospel, Jesus summarizes what life in the world will be like for His followers⁹ by saying: "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have **tribulation** but take courage; I have overcome the world."¹⁰ Jesus spoke these words to His disciples in Jerusalem, after the Last Supper, just before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. He wanted to prepare His disciples for what was about to take place with Himself, as well as prepare them for what would take place with themselves in the future. The Greek word translated "tribulation" is *thlipsis*, which can also be translated as: *pressure, affliction, anguish, distress, trouble*. Here, Jesus is not only referring to "the great tribulation",¹¹ which is understood to be either a 7 or 3 ½ year period near the end of the age, but He was particularly referring to **the normal, on-going condition of the world throughout human history**.

There are some very significant Old Testament references to tribulation of which Paul said: "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."¹² These are prophetic Scriptures which have past, present and future fulfillments.

⁹ John 15:18; 16:1-4, 32-33

¹⁰ John 16:33 *New American Standard Bible*.

¹¹ Matthew 24:21 & 29, Mark 13: 19 & 24, Revelation 7:14

¹² 1 Corinthians 10:11

Isaiah prophesied: “One keeps calling to me from Seir, “Watchman, how far gone is the night? Watchman, how far gone is the night?’ The watchman says, ‘Morning comes but also night. If you would inquire, inquire; come back again.’”¹³ The “night” refers to the Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities of Israel¹⁴ (773 & 623 B.C.) Since that time, **God’s people have been living in captivity within the world system.**¹⁵

But Isaiah also prophesied: “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you.”¹⁶ This is a picture of light shining in the midst of the darkness.

I believe these prophetic pictures coincide with what Jesus said things would look like just prior to His coming. As we read in Matthew 24, Jesus related to His disciples a list of tribulations that would be covering the earth just prior to His Coming¹⁷, and at the end of the list He said: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”¹⁸ So we see “great darkness covering the earth” with various tribulations,

¹³ Isaiah 21:11b-12

¹⁴ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary

¹⁵ Specifically, not having a land governed by a theocracy.

¹⁶ Isaiah 60:1-2

¹⁷ Matthew 24:3-13

¹⁸ Matthew 24:14

and right in the midst of this darkness the Lord will have the light of “the gospel of His kingdom being preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations” – a picture of light shining in the darkness.

The apostle Luke quoted the apostles Paul and Barnabas as saying that there would be “**many tribulations**” before we enter the kingdom of God.¹⁹ The apostle Paul bore witness to Jesus’ warnings of a future filled with tribulation when he wrote to Timothy: “But realize this, that in the last days²⁰ **difficult times** will come.”²¹ The Greek word translated “difficult” is *chalepos*, which can also be translated *perilous, grievous, stressful* – in other words, “hard times”.

God’s Purpose in Tribulation

Let’s look again at what Jesus said: “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have **tribulation** but take courage; I have overcome the world.”²² Besides telling us that the prospect of our future is **tribulation**, Jesus is also communicating His promise to His disciples for the

¹⁹ Acts 14:22

²⁰ Namely, the days of the New Covenant initiated by the first coming of the Messiah and ending with the second coming of Christ.

²¹ 2 Timothy 3:1

²² John 16:33

future: **peace in tribulation** if we have **courage in overcoming**.

Jesus said: **“In the world you have tribulation...”** We may ask: **“Why? Why tribulation?”** What is it about this **world** that causes **tribulation**? The simple, bottom-line answer is **Sin**. Because of humanity’s fall into sin, God has cursed this world.²³ Although **“God so loved the world...”**²⁴, there is also a **“dark side”**²⁵ to this world so that Scripture exhorts us: **“Do not love the world.”**²⁶ Why? What is wrong with the world? What we need to understand is that this world **“lies under the power of”** a different god²⁷, who is an adversary to both God and humanity.²⁸ **It is Satan and sin, not God, that causes tribulation in the world.**²⁹

But God has a purpose for His people in tribulation. The apostle Paul writes: **“Let us also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.”**³⁰ God’s purpose in tribulation is

²³ Romans 8:20-23, Ecclesiastes 11:2, 8

²⁴ John 3:16

²⁵ 2 Thessalonians 2:7

²⁶ 1John 2:15-17

²⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19

²⁸ Daniel 7:25, John 6:28-29, 10:10, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 6:10-20, 1 Peter 5:8.

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion of **“the World”**, see *“The Spirit of the World”*: [paperback](#), [eBook](#).

³⁰ Romans 5:3-4

to produce in His people the proven character that comes with perseverance and hope – **the character of Christ.**

God has a **“good purpose”** for His people in tribulation; and that **“good purpose”** is revealed by the apostle Paul in his Roman epistle: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for **good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His **purpose**. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become **conformed to the image of His Son....**"³¹ The **“good purpose”** of God is **to conform us to the image of Jesus – the character of Christ.**

The writer to the Hebrews tells us how God uses tribulation to achieve this **“good purpose”**: “And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will **shake** not only the earth, but also the heaven.’³² This expression, "Yet once more," denotes **the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.** Therefore, since we receive a **kingdom which cannot be shaken**, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe....”³³

³¹ Romans 8:28-29

³² Haggai 2:6

³³ Hebrews 12:26-28

What the writer to the Hebrews tells us about God's kingdom is that it "cannot be shaken". This is what Jesus told us regarding His kingdom: "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the nations eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you."³⁴

The apostle Paul defined the kingdom of God in these terms: "**The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**"³⁵ But, we all have a natural tendency to focus on the "created things" like "what we will eat, what we will drink, and what we will wear".³⁶ So, **through tribulation, God shakes and removes these things to refocus our hearts and lives**³⁷ onto the things that are **eternal** – the things of His unshakeable kingdom - "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit".³⁸

Let's look again at what Paul said about tribulation and character: "Let us also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and

³⁴ Matthew 6:31-33

³⁵ Romans 14:17

³⁶ Matthew 6:31

³⁷ I would like to suggest that God even uses the chaos created by the "schemes of the Devil" to accomplish His work of shaking, removing, and refocusing.

³⁸ Romans 14:17

perseverance, **proven character**; and proven character, hope.”³⁹

The Greek word, *dokime*, is translated “proven character” in the *New American Standard Bible* and is translated “experience” in the King James Version. W.E. Vine says it means “*the effect of proving, approval*”.⁴⁰ This is referring to character which has been tested by experience and approved.⁴¹ Persevering in tribulation brings about proven experience. Persevering in tribulation brings about the actual experience of Christ and having the doctrines of Christ become experiential in our lives. Christ proves His reality to us; and our characters are approved by God. It’s the difference between a professing faith and a living faith. Without this we are likely to be “holding to a form of godliness but denying its power”.⁴²

The Church in Western Nations

We may ask: “*Is persevering in tribulation really necessary to form the character of Christ?*” We can start to answer that question with the verses from Hebrews which say that “the Author of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings” and “although He was a Son, He learned

³⁹ Romans 5:3-4

⁴⁰ *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

⁴¹ A good example of this “the effect of proving, approval” is the story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac. Genesis 22:1-14

⁴² 2 Timothy 3:5

obedience from the things which He suffered”.⁴³ Jesus had to, but we don’t need to? We are exhorted to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” This was Jesus’ path to glory. Do we really think we can get there a different way?

The fact is: without tribulation, our natural tendency is to “sow to our own flesh, and from the flesh reap corruption”.⁴⁴ Paul warned us: “Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh.”⁴⁵ Let’s reflect on that a bit: In the context of his Galatian epistle, Paul is referring to our freedom in Christ – freedom from the Law. But Paul’s phrase regarding “freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” can be understood in terms of “freedom of lifestyle”; and I am going to speak in terms of the lifestyle of the Church in Western nations. There are aspects of our lifestyle that are there because of the freedom we enjoy, and in turn, these very same things also create more freedom in our lifestyle. I’m referring to things like education, career, regular income, “discretionary” income, home and property, a multitude of possessions, the availability of social services, financial savings, and investments, et al. – all these things give us a freedom of lifestyle that goes way

⁴³ Hebrews 2:10; 5:8

⁴⁴ Galatians 6:8

⁴⁵ Galatians 5:13

beyond daily survival – namely: “Give us this day our daily bread.”⁴⁶

The fact is: The freedom we enjoy affords many, many “opportunities for our flesh”. There are some that are more noble, like creative pursuits, which are wonderful when done as acts of worship for the glory of God rather than a means of self-aggrandizement. But for the most part, these “opportunities for our flesh” result in a plethora of “**diversions**” – **unessential entertainments**. Let’s compare our normal everyday lives with Paul’s idea of the normal Christian life: “Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”⁴⁷

The word “dissipation” in the *New American Standard Bible* is translated “excess” in the *King James Version*. The Greek word is *asortia*, which means prodigality, wasteful – that is, a waste of time, a frivolous diversion. **The fundamental sickness of the Church in Western**

⁴⁶ Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3

⁴⁷ Ephesians 5:15-21. Paul gives a similar view of the normal Christian life in Romans 12:9-21.

nations is that our freedom affords almost unlimited opportunities for frivolous diversions to sow to our flesh, which, at best, have little to no spiritual value, and at worse, reap spiritual corruption. The result is a loss of spiritual passion for our “First Love”⁴⁸ – our hearts are divided, fragmented by our many “loves”. Jesus, Himself, warned us that these “time-wasting, frivolous diversions” would be a stumbling block to us in the last days: He said: “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap, for it will come all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.”⁴⁹

The Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well had five husbands. This woman symbolizes the church that still needs an authentic revelation of Christ.⁵⁰ The Bride that Jesus plans to present to Himself is a Church that is dedicated and devoted to **Him**⁵¹ - a Bride whose heart is not fragmented and led astray by multiple loves but has single devotion to Christ.⁵²

⁴⁸ Revelation 2:4

⁴⁹ Luke 21:34-35

⁵⁰ John 4

⁵¹ Ephesians 5:27

⁵² 2 Corinthians 11:2-3

I've had the privilege of ministering in hundreds of churches in the Global South.⁵³ Being in the midst of these churches, one cannot help but ask oneself: *"What's the difference? How does one describe the difference between the quality of spirituality and lifestyle between these churches and churches in the Western world?"* The best way I can describe it is with the word **"Passion"**. Of all the many spiritual blessings the Church in Western nations has been given and may have to offer, it lacks the passion of the Church of the Global South.⁵⁴

Passion is at the heart of the matter; and the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. But the proverb tells us to "Keep your heart with all diligence for from it spring the issues of life."⁵⁵ **This fragmented heart syndrome manifests itself definitively in our life and character.** In his second letter to Timothy, his last epistle, Paul describes the pervading lifestyle and character traits that will be the spiritual environment of the last days: "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious

⁵³ Viz. Africa and Latin America. For further reading in this regard, I highly recommend *The Next Christendom* and *The New Faces of Christianity* by Philip Jenkins.

⁵⁴ For further reading on the general topic of our culture's obsession with entertainments: *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* by Neil Postman & *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment: Rediscovering Passion & Wonder* by Richard Winter

⁵⁵ Proverbs 4:23 *The New King James Version*

gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these.⁶ For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses,⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”⁵⁶

“Difficult times” – the Greek word is *chalepos*, which literally means “*reducing strength*”⁵⁷ – times that are difficult and stressful. Tribulation causes what we might call “*The Toothpaste Tube Effect*”: when squeezed, what’s inside comes out. Unfortunately, what so often comes out are all the character traits on this list – each one calls for sermon itself. Of particular interest to me are “lovers of self”⁵⁸ – the quintessential flaw from the Fall; and “disobedient to parents”⁵⁹ – a trait which might seem not noteworthy enough to appear on this list, but that is only because we don’t fully realize how the Fall has fundamentally affected parent – child relationships. But the trait I want to comment on in this message is “**without self-control**”⁶⁰:

⁵⁶ 2 Timothy 3:1-7

⁵⁷ *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*

⁵⁸ Verse 2

⁵⁹ Verse 2

⁶⁰ Verse 3

The Greek word which is translated “without self-control” is *akrasia*. It literally means “*incontinent, powerless, lacking strength*”⁶¹. The medical condition of “incontinence” is an unpleasant but vivid analogy of this spiritual condition. All of our freedom with the accompanying diversions not only depletes our passion for Christ, but, in spite of all of our spiritual resources, makes us **spiritually weak – carnal Christians**. Our brothers and sisters in the Global South are impressed by our spiritual resources but shocked by our weakness of Christian character.

Tribulation - Perseverance - Proven Character

Here is a key: **We receive spiritual power from God during times of tribulation and this causes us to grow spiritually stronger.** In Colossians 1:11 Paul wrote this phrase: “being strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, for the attaining of all perseverance (or endurance)⁶² and patience.” We may understand this in this way: During tribulation God strengthens us with what the apostle Paul calls “the perseverance (or endurance) of Christ”.⁶³

⁶¹ Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

⁶² Same Greek word, *hupomone*.

⁶³ 2 Thessalonians 3:5 (See also Revelation 3:10) Same Greek word, *hupomone*.

“Tribulation brings about perseverance (or endurance).”⁶⁴

Perseverance (or endurance) comes only through tribulation. That’s the nature of the case – it doesn’t come any other way. The Greek word is *hupomone*, which literally means “*abiding under*” – enduring hard times. In his epistle, the apostle James explains that it is “the testing of your faith (which) produces endurance (or perseverance).⁶⁵ He encourages us to “let perseverance (or endurance) have its perfect results, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”⁶⁶ And in this way our character is proven, our love for Christ is proven, and we receive “the crown of life”.⁶⁷ Paul reminds Timothy: “If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”⁶⁸

Again, Jesus told us that “in the world you will have tribulation”.⁶⁹ And He also told us that as this age draws to a close, the tribulations would grow worse.⁷⁰ Do not say, “*It can never happen here.*”⁷¹ The Church in Western nations are not exempt.

⁶⁴ Romans 5:3 (Also see Romans 12:12)

⁶⁵ James 1:3

⁶⁶ James 1:4

⁶⁷ James 1:12 (See also Luke 21:19; Romans 2:7 and 1 Peter 2:20.)

⁶⁸ 2 Timothy 2:12 Same Greek word in the verb form, *hupomeno*.

⁶⁹ John 16:33

⁷⁰ Cf. Matthew 24

⁷¹ Taken from the title of the book *Persecution: It Will Never Happen Here?* By Jan Pit, Open Doors (1981)

In the opening lines of the Book of Revelation, the apostle John identified himself as “your brother and fellow partaker in the **tribulation** and **kingdom** and **perseverance** which are in Jesus” – linking **perseverance** with both **tribulation** and **the kingdom**. As the apostle Paul said, it is in this way that “through many **tribulations** we must enter **the kingdom of God**.”⁷²

Tribulation serves as a preparation which God ordained for His Church. It is a way through which **God will form a people – the Church (the Ekklesia)** - who will embrace the kingdom of heaven as the Man Jesus of Nazareth did, when He walked this earth. Like Jesus, we can have **courage in overcoming** and **peace in tribulation**. We can learn to have the kingdom’s “**righteousness, peace and joy**” in the midst of the **tribulation**.⁷³

⁷² Acts 14:12

⁷³ “*Tribulation*” is an excerpt from the book, “*Facing the Future*”: [paperback](#), [eBook](#).

Bill & Frances Furioso
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Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, disciplined many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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